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## **When Inspiration Fails**

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# **When Inspiration Fails**

by

**Kyle Christopher Schnack, B.A.**

**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

*To my wife Katelyn for her unwavering love and support.*

*Patience and Faith.*

## *Preface*

There are moments in my life that I can remember vividly: I remember as a child watching my little brother's hand get crushed by the garage door and doing nothing to help him; I remember the first girl I ever kissed, Melissa, and the look on our pre-school teachers face as she caught us in the playhouse; I remember my father waiting by the front door for me to pass by so he could give me what I'm now certain was a well deserved spanking; I remember the one time that my mother slapped me across the face when I was old enough to challenge her authority... I'm sure that was deserved also; I remember the first time I laid eyes on my wife, she wore a red threaded hoody, blue jeans, and her hair was the curliest, most beautiful golden mess I had ever seen; I remember calling my mother that night and telling her I couldn't come home on time because I had met "a really great girl;" I remember the phone call from the hospital, the day my father died; and I remember the first time I truly wrestled with God in the way that Jacob did in the book of Genesis.

What I remember in the next ten, twenty and thirty years is yet to be determined... but hey, at least I wrote some of it down.

## **When Inspiration Fails**

by

Kyle Christopher Schnack, MFA  
The University of Texas at Austin, 2013  
SUPERVISOR: Franchelle Dorn

The following is an in-depth look into the artistic process of actor Kyle Christopher Schnack, as reflected through his three year graduate level education in acting at the University of Texas at Austin and his work in Suzan Zeder's play "The Edge of Peace;" a joint production through The University of Texas at Austin and Seattle Children's Theatre.

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## Chapter One

### ‘The People’

The following is the opinion of one man. Take it or leave it, but don't change it.

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I have come to the inevitable conclusion that an educational facility is the absolute worst place for an artist. The mind gets trapped in the overwhelming tidal wave of thought, and the body is swallowed by the undertow. People forget to live. People forget to go out into the world and see the events of life that should serve as the muse of creation. People often create in school because they must, not because they are inspired. Children are encouraged, and dare I say forced, to do their best to get a grade on something that was never intended to have a grade in the first place. So, what then is an educational facility good for to the artist if it is nothing more than a trap? Nothing. But, it is extremely good for a student; one who is questing to become something more than himself; one who is looking to find the tools to help him build a future, to describe what he has seen in the world and reveal it through the window of his soul.

Art should be inspired from the core of one's being. Art should come from a spur of the moment impulse that drives a person to say, “I *need* a pen! Does anybody have a pen?” If anyone ever says to someone else, “I *want* to be a photographer,” or “I *want* to



be the next great so and so,” then I think it is fair to say that that person will go on wanting things their entire life, until one day they wake up and realize they have nothing. That is when the test of their character will come. When the whole world is against them and they choose to say, “Now is the moment when I will stop wanting, and do.” And that is what school is good for. It is a place that allows the young person time... time to figure out what and who they want to be, where and when they want to go, and how they are going to get there- before they wake up having “wanted.”

Dustin Hoffman in an interview on “Inside the Actor’s Studio” quoted Pablo Picasso as having said, “If they took away my paints I’d use pastels. If they took away my pastels I’d use crayons. If they took away my crayons I’d use pencils. If they stripped me naked and threw me in prison I’d spit on my finger and paint on the walls.”

It is the person who must do this that should do this- the person that could not imagine doing anything else. For an actor it is the person who cannot resist the urge to play, for a playwright it is the person who simply must tell a story, for a director it is the person with the unwavering necessity to create an inspiring picture, and so on and so forth. These people I think are few and rare, and if they are never tried and tested how should they ever know if the artist’s life is truly the one they were meant to live?

In my brief career and education as an actor I have been tested time and time again. I have met rare people in life and theatre who have inspired me, and from them I have learned more about acting and being an artist than I ever could have learned sitting in a classroom... but that may be due to my immense phobia of sitting. In the pages that

follow I will construct the platform for their stories and how they have come to impact my artistic life so greatly while I was cast in Suzan Zeder's play *The Edge of Peace*:

❖ The Spirit:

I begin with God, for what greater teacher could a man ask for than the creator of the universe. In the story of the calming of the storm in the Bible, a picture is painted by the text of Jesus asleep in the boat while the sea thrashed around him... Well, why don't I just let you read it for yourself:

*ESV Mark 4: 35-40: "On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." <sup>36</sup> And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. <sup>37</sup> And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. <sup>38</sup> But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" <sup>39</sup> And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. <sup>40</sup> He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"*

Fear is to me like venomous quicksand. Whenever I have tried to fight my way out of it, I inevitably cannot help but sink deeper and deeper into it. And if by some good fortune I escape its sinking torment, then I will carry with me the

poison of its venom, like a mocking echo chanting in my ear, “Remember me, remember me.” In the theatre I have encountered no greater obstacle than fear. It is a crippling agony. And it is only because of my faith in Jesus Christ that I am able to step on stage at all.

What need do I have to be afraid when I know that after everything else fails and falls, Christ is standing in triumph. He is the only judge I have, so why then should I fear the criticism of other sinners, like myself, around me? It is our faith that defines who we are. It is what we choose to believe in that binds us to our fate.

Every show I have ever acted in begins with me standing in the wings of the theatre, trembling, with a tempest of fear swelling in my chest. It never goes away, and I don’t expect it ever will. But what my faith in Christ grants me is peace- that no matter how bad this show might turn out, no matter if a spotlight fell square on my head in the middle of act one, no matter if I forget all of my lines, all will be well because I have a God who loves me anyway.

❖ The Heart:

My wife has sculpted my heart with her bare hands. In it she has embedded qualities stripped from both the worlds of fairy tales and tragedy. Together we have experienced love at first sight, life wrenching heartache, youthful ignorance,

extreme joy, wonderful and horrible friends, tremendous pain, weddings, birthdays, we have climbed mountains, swum in oceans, driven across the country, shared lunch inside a tomb in London, stood amongst the bells of Notre Dame; we have laughed, cried, punched trees, and so on, and so much more. She has shown me a world others would think only exists in plays, and thus has taught me more about life, the appropriateness of emotion, and thus acting, than any other person I have yet to encounter.

In *The Edge of Peace*, my character Ricky is fighting overseas in World War II. Before he goes missing he is able to write letters home to his mother, little brother, and to his wife June. Now, the choice could be argued to play these letters as heightened prose, that the need to express emotion is strong because they are in a time of war and this may very well be the last letter Ricky ever writes home.

However, I recall a time in my life when I was a young boy. My now wife Katie and I were no older than thirteen, and we had just gone on a group date with some of our friends to see a movie. As we walked back home, we were passed by a band of young adults who chose to double back and confront my friends and me, thinking one of us had said something to insult them. We hadn't. The leader of their group approached us with a crazed look in his eyes and wielding a knife.

Without thought I moved to stand between him and my company, knowing that the love of my life was behind me and that I would protect her no matter what. The thug and I stood nose to nose for what seemed like hours, neither one of us willing to give an inch. If it came down to it, I was ready and willing to sacrifice myself to save the woman I loved; to protect her, to keep her safe. It was not a difficult choice. It was instinct - standing against injustice and protecting what is good.

He finally backed off and left with his gang. And looking back I know there was nothing heroic about it. I was thrown into circumstances that I didn't choose; the same way Ricky was fighting a battle he didn't choose. The question then, is what is he trying to protect? The answer for me could only be one thing: June, the love of his life.

Thus, the moments in the play when he is addressing June in a letter, I decided to keep simple and honest. Because in times of trouble that's what any good man would do, protect the person he loves the most. It is instinct, and as such requires nothing extra layered on top of it. It simply is.

❖ The Pulse:

In *The Edge of Peace* I had the privilege to act in a scene with one of the greatest actors I have ever met, Franchelle Dorn. We shared only one scene in the play,

but in it I felt like I was waking up for the first time every night. All I had to do was look into her eyes, and see her looking back in my mine, and then I would think to myself, “Why am I working so hard? She makes it look so easy.”

She made it so easy to be an actor. She made so clear to me the power and simplicity of talking and listening. Admittedly, I was terrified the first time we ran through our scene in rehearsal. But, she displayed such grace and humility towards me that I began longing to do the scene again. I couldn’t wait to share that moment with Fran every night.

From her I learned good character, both on stage and off. I learned that there is always time to love other people, and to show kindness and compassion to them. I learned that the passion one has for one’s art never leaves. I learned to be unapologetic about my values, and myself. And that sometimes life happens and that’s okay, and to just roll with it. And I learned that anything is possible, you just have to be brave enough to ask for what you want.

❖ The Eyes:

Linda Hartzell is a woman with a vision. As the director of *The Edge of Peace* she had a great ability of maintaining control. From the beginning she made it very clear that she preferred small intimate moments from the actors, as opposed to big gestural ones. She desired the actors to genuinely feel something, as

opposed to showing or putting on the feeling of something as one would a costume.

I loved working with her. She knew when it was time to work and she knew when it was time to dink around, and she indulged in both opportunities fully. She was always clear, respectful, and fun, and as long as you treated her the same way, there were no problems.

Linda Hartzell is a wonderful example of a director who likes to keep the drama on the stage, and that is a quality that should be admired.

❖ The Hands:

Suzan Zeder is a rare gift for an actor. She and I spoke several times about Ricky and his story in *The Edge of Peace*. She would share with me her feelings on the letters that he wrote home to his family, and how one of them was a genuine letter from WWII. If I was confused about a line, specific wording or a moment in the play, she would generously share her insights. If I had ideas about possibly changing a part of the text to fit the scene we were building during rehearsals, she would listen, and we would engage in a health conversation about what could work in that moment, or not.

She is a woman of great humility, and she is an unmatched example of what I mean when I say, those that must do this should do this. If Suzan Zeder did not tell stories, the world of children's theatre would not be what it is today. And from her I take the advice she gave to young playwrights in an interview she did with TheaterJones.com, cleverly titled *Q&A: Suzan Zeder*. In it she said, "Bring your best game... My advice is to learn your craft, find great collaborators, embrace the depth of your material, the intelligence of your audience, and work harder than you ever thought you'd have to work to get it right! Writing for and about young people can truly be life changing, for them and for you!"

❖ The Darkness:

Throughout life there are people who will tell you, "You can't." Take the opportunity to prove them wrong, or to prove yourself wrong. Either way, the least you can do is to *do* something.



## Chapter Two

### ‘The Work’

On Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011 I received an email informing me that I was to play the role of Ricky Ricks in Suzan Zeder’s play *The Edge of Peace*. On Friday, January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013 we had our first day of rehearsal in Austin, Texas. On March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013 we closed the show in Seattle, Washington. And somewhere in the middle of all that hodgepodge, I did some other stuff. As I sit here writing this, I am surrounded by journals, books, notes... and all I can think about is how when the moment came and I was on stage during the performance none of this stuff mattered. I wasn’t thinking about the name of the gun in my hand (M1 standard issue rifle), or what unit I might have been in while in the infantry, or what age I was when I married June (Ricky’s wife in the play), or how, as I wrote a love letter to my wife, my helmet would probably be smelling fairly rank because, if we are keeping within the reality of the play, I had probably taken a crap in it earlier, as many WWII soldiers did when they had no other place to do their business.

I wasn’t thinking about any of those things, but that is not to say that those things did not inform the character in some way. An actor’s process is his and his alone. Why do you think there are so many different techniques in acting; they’re all trying to get to the

same point, but even the best known acting coaches cannot agree on the most effective way of getting there. The actor must learn to become an interpreter of the soul, and begin to ask *why* people behave the way they do, and stop looking at *how*. For it is when you ask *how*, that you become an imitator and stop becoming an actor. Thus, the majority of my preparation and rehearsal process is a translation period between myself and the script; myself and the director; myself and the playwright; and myself and the other characters.

For every play my preparation period begins about two weeks prior to the first day of rehearsal. In this period I dissect and study the script, and I start to wrestle with the questions of who, what, where, and when as they apply to the text (notice I did not include the question of how, for reasons previously stated). It is important for me to spend a significant amount of time with these questions in these first two weeks, somewhere between one and two hours per day, because I know that once I begin rehearsals I will do my best never to think about them again, but rather rely on the hope that those answers are there, living inside me.

Who does my character love? Who does my character hate? Who does my character talk about in the script? Who does my character not talk about in the script? Who is my character's family? Who are my character's friends? In the context of *The Edge of Peace* the answers to these questions are very simple for Ricky. Ricky loves his little brother and mother, but most of all, he loves his wife. I know this because he writes letters to them while he is at war, and he refers to his wife June as his "dearest." Ricky's

father is not present, nor is he mentioned in the script. Ricky has a friend in his unit by the name of Gus. Gus is mentioned once in the script...

What does that mean?

Why is Gus only mentioned once in the script? Why mention him at all?

Where is this going?

I'll tell you where it is going. I write this out in this way to demonstrate what my mind is doing when I first read through a script. As you can see, it is chaos. So before I can move forward in doing any work of significance, I must first create some kind of order. For no other reason but that that is how my mind works most effectively.

So, first things first:

❖ The Script:

*Step One- Print and Bind.*

This may seem trivial, but when it comes to making your life as an actor as easy and stress free as possible, there is nothing more important. I don't know how many times I have had to fumble around with a three-ring binder in the rehearsal room; trying to balance it, read out of it, and play with my scene partner all at the same time. Awful.

But, thankfully I have found a wonderful alternative in coil binding. For the last few years I have taken it upon myself to go to my local FedEx-Kinkos and print my script out in a single sided format. If you are comfortable making script notes

in the margin, double sided may work, but single sided allows for you to make extensive notes, add images, etc. Then, I take my printed script up to the counter and have the attendant coil bind it for me. When it is finished, my script looks something like an oversized spiral notebook.

This allows the script maximum mobility, and it prevents me from having to do the flamingo dance with a three-ring binder. And the best part is, it gives me freedom to move around the rehearsal room comfortably and helps me to put my attention back where it should be - on my scene partner.

*Step Two- Highlight lines.*

I like to use a variety of different colors when highlighting a script: Yellow to indicate the lines that I actually speak; Blue for when people are speaking about me in a positive way; Red for when people are speaking about me in a negative way; and Green to indicate scripted movement given by the playwright.

This allows for my eyes and my brain to speak to each other faster, and helps me to know what I need to prepare for next when I am working a scene in rehearsal.

*Step Three- Bookmark the script.*

This is a step for functionality. So that when you are working in rehearsal and all of the sudden your director says, “Turn to page so and so, you know, that scene

where you do that thing,” then having quickly translated the jargon, you can navigate easily through your script because you have bookmarked each scene that you are in.

I prefer to use stick on place-keepers that can be found in the office supplies section of any store carrying such goods. But if all else fails, I have also been known to use a paperclip, or the good old-fashioned dog-ear trick.

#### *Step Four-Dissect the script.*

In this step I comb through the script and look for some specific types of information: Words I don’t know the meaning of or don’t know how to pronounce correctly, locations I am unfamiliar with geographically, and dates and events which are significant to the plot and/or my characters story line. I then underline or circle that information and make a note in the margin as to its significance. This makes it easy for me to cross check the information if need be at a future date.

#### *Step Five- Memorize the lines*

I have never loathed anything more than someone wasting my time. One of the biggest wastes of time is when a lazy actor is learning lines during a rehearsal. In my humble opinion, that is work that should be done on your own and at home.

The rehearsal space should be for the actors to figure out the action of their scenes together, and that cannot happen if one of the actors is nose deep in their lines.

I always believe it is a good idea to be off book day one of rehearsal, and I have never heard a good argument against it.

#### ❖ The Rehearsal Room

I have a very specific set of self-imposed rules when it comes to the rehearsal process.

1. Stay busy. When you're at work, work. Otherwise, why are you there?

Review your lines, go over your scene analysis, observe how the director communicates with the actors on stage so that you are prepared to speak the same language, etc.

2. Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable. In the theatre, when one person is late it rocks the whole boat. Don't rock the boat. It creates waves.

3. Treat others with kindness and respect, even when they don't deserve it.

This includes one's self.

4. Be prepared. Never allow anyone the opportunity to say you weren't ready.

I have made a habit of abiding by these rules, and they have served me well. If you don't give people the opportunity to be concerned about your work ethic, then

they have no reason to be. This way of working has made my life much easier, and hopefully it makes it easier for the people around me. I would expect no less from anyone else.

## Chapter Three

### ‘The Play’

Evaluating one’s own performance can be a grueling task for anyone, but for an actor it is damn near impossible. In acting school the younglings are taught to dare to be wrong, to make a bold choice no matter what, that there is no right or wrong. But the reality is, there are things that work on stage and there are things that don’t. Sometimes the audience will respond and sometimes they won’t. Sometimes that is for good reason and sometimes it is for reason beyond the comprehension of the human mind. The important thing is for an actor to be able to understand which critiques are technical and which ones are opinions.

There are so many technicalities during a performance. All of which must be dancing with each other at the same time so that the audience is receiving the information in the most effective way. And those are the only things that should be taken to heart by an actor; those technical notes of making sure you are fronting, that your face is in the light, that your volume is sufficient for the house you are playing in, etc. All of which are intended to enhance the reception of the story to the audience, and all of which have immediate fixes. Because if they can’t understand you, then what’s the point? All the rest of it becomes an opinion; was it good or bad, did I like that actor or not? Whether or not



those expectations are your own, of the producing body, or from the audience, as long as you have done your work, the rest of it is manageable - the rest is fixable.

In evaluation of my own performance in *The Edge of Peace*, I found the staging to be difficult to work with. It was essential that I have my face in the light when I was speaking, especially in the final scene when Ricky is revealed as alive and he is explaining to Nell why he has been hiding. The audience receives the information by seeing the actor speak and hear his words, and if either one of those is taken away, then their job becomes much more difficult. And the last thing an actor needs is an audience feeling like they have to work to enjoy the show.

The director blocked the scene in a way that my scene partner was always upstage of me. I understand why it was designed that way. It was an attempt to create a picture that displays a vulnerable, frightened, and broken man who lowers his own status to ask for help from a woman he had once openly ridiculed. Every instinct in me wanted to turn towards her and engage. But, if I wanted the audience to receive the story, I had to force myself to face front and keep my eyes in the light. In the end, I had to find an action for Ricky that served that staging. So, instead of allowing Ricky to have a release of his fear and embarrassment, it was necessary for him to clutch it, as if it were the only part of himself that he still recognized as human.

That staging proved to be a struggle for me until the final days of the show, but I am glad to say that it was the only thing I truly wrestled with in terms of criticizing my own work. There were other moments in the play however where I felt like there was

some differentiation in feedback from the director and the audience. In particular, the effectiveness of the explosion sequences.

At the top of the show and again at the top of act two, Ricky is caught by surprise when mortar shells fall in his immediate vicinity. Our fight choreographer and I came up with a technical jump that would ensure safety and achieve the desired appearance. However, because the maneuver required me to do a horizontal one hundred and eighty degree turn, it was hard for me to judge... well, how it looked.

Throughout the entire rehearsal process I never received a note on it, which I translated to mean that it is working well. But, after we had performed a few shows I began getting feedback from the audience about how the explosion jumps looked “strange.”

I was caught by surprise, never having given it a second thought and assuming that the jumps were continuing to go well. Knowing that it was way too late in the game to change anything I kept these audience observations to myself. But, from now on, I will make it a point to ask my director if any of my physical acting is looking “strange.”

As I said earlier, there are times when working in the theatre that an actor has no control over how the audience is going to respond. In the final scene of the play when Ricky is revealed as the man who had been snooping about the town of Ware, it was anybody’s guess how the audience was going to react. Some nights they'd gasp in mutual revelation, having discovered together the puzzle that the play had aimed to establish. And other nights there would be nothing.

For the life of me I could not tell you why this is, and I dare not try to explain it. But what I do know is that we provided the same show to each and every audience, and no matter how responsive or placid they were, they all engaged with the same enthusiasm in the post show conversations. The mysteries of live performance... you gotta love it.

## Chapter Four

### 'The Training'

For eight years I have been studying acting. Five of those years I spent taking on information, because I was sure I didn't know anything. And then, when I was sure I knew everything there was to know, I spent three years letting it all go and came to the realization that it is better to be in the unknown than to live in the illusion of knowledge. In the words of Socrates, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." Right and wrong, truth and untruth - these are all relative terms that depend on the perspective of the one on the quest for answers. No one will agree, ever. People may claim to be on mutual standing grounds, sure, but in a world of imperfections we must accept that there are things that are simply beyond our grasps; objects and ideas that are incomprehensible and unattainable. And when we come to this understanding that we are no more than a blip on the radar of eternity, only then will we find our contentment, and our gratitude.

And this is what I have found in my journey through my graduate education: profound contentment and gratitude for the things I have gained, and what's more the things I have lost. With courses in acting, voice, movement, storytelling, collaboration and more, I have been given a wealthy portion of education. Earlier in this text I stated that I believe that an educational facility is the worst place for an artist, but when I entered this program I was not an artist. I was a student hungry to learn how to build a

career in the global arena of theatre, and to see if there was an answer to the question: what happens when inspiration fails?

Through my training at The University of Texas at Austin I am happy to say that I have found an answer to that question. It came to me by way of a wonderful man by the name of Professor Lee Abraham. He is to me as Splinter was to the Ninja Turtles; as Mr. Miyagi was to the Karate Kid; as Yoda was to Luke Skywalker. He is my unexpected wise man and mentor (even if he doesn't know it), and a man I will remember and admire for the rest of my life. He told me that *craft prevails when inspiration fails*. I have now had three years to have tried and tested that theory, and so far it has proven to be true.

The entire three years of my Master in Fine Arts training can be filtered into two categories: craft that works for me, and craft that doesn't. Training to become an actor is just like any other specialty, you have to find the way that works best for you and let the rest go. But the important thing is that you allow yourself the opportunity to try new ideas, because if you never try you will most certainly never know.

I have found that I like things that make logical sense. So, anything that requires me to roll around pretending to be a tree while feeling the energy from my toes to my nose... ain't gonna work for me. Whereas, breathing low and physically feeling the resonance in my crown, mask, and chest are ideas I can grab a hold of. Do this, like this, and it will have this result. Logical.

Here are some more specific examples of methods I have latched onto in my three years at the University of Texas at Austin:

❖ Voice:

Under the instruction of Associate Professor Barney Hammond and Doctor Pamela Christian I have learned a great deal of useful and logical information that I can take with me as I continue my career in acting. From Associate Professor Hammond I have gained immensely useful tools that will aid me in my pre-show warm up for the rest of my life. And from Doctor Christian I have learned how to effectively approach any character with an accent, dialect, or specific character voice.

The logic I found in Associate Professor Hammond's work came from his Private Studio block system, which outlines specific exercises that are intended to achieve precise goals in each block. For example:

- Block One: Freeing and Releasing
  - Knee Bounce w/ Voice Releasing on "Hey, Hi, Ho, Who"
  - Locked Knee Breath/ Free Knee Breath (compare and contrast)
  - Swing in Breath
  - Swing Knees, Hips & Shoulders
  - Windmill
  - Breath Toss Left/Right Sides
  - Larynx Message (Jut & Clench)

- Gentle Larynx Jiggle (Up 3 Tones & Down 3 Tones)
- Chewing (Count #1-10)
- Count #1-10 on Voice
- Head Role
- Swing in Breath with Released Jaw
- Two Finger Vowels
- Facial Message on Hum
- Block Two: Dropping in the Breath
  - Bear Hug (3 Breaths on Hum)
  - Sides (3 Breaths on Hum)
  - Center (Elbows to naval/ 3 Breaths on Hum)
  - Full Instrument (Elbows to Knees/ 3 Breaths on Hum)
  - Sound Toss ("Hey, Hi, Ho, Who")
- Block Three: Rooting and Grounding
  - Dead Weight Drop- Knees ("Hey, Hi, Ho, Who")
  - Dead Weight Jump ("Hey, Hi, Ho, Who")
  - Dead Weight Jump- double time
  - Seated Rocking ("Hey, Hi, ho, Who")
  - Standing Count #1-10 (1, 1-2, 1-3, 1-4...etc.)
- Block Four: Breath Capacity & Support

- Six Recoveries on Hands and Knees (voiced "Z")
- Child's Pose Stretch
- "Sudden Skinny"- Hold/Drop on Hands and Knees
- Build Spine to Standing
- Walk About
- "Stop-Push" (Hands on Center, release on "Shh")
- Swing In "Stop-Push"- (Hands Remaining at Top of Swing)
- Gut Slug ("Hey, Hi, Ho, Who")
- Point ("Hey, Hi, Ho, Who")
- Block Five: Muscularity
  - Consonants (p,b,t,d,k,g)
  - Vowels
  - Diphthongs ("David's Tight Voice Won't Shout")
  - R-coloring (ir, air, or, are)
  - "Eager Boys Meet On The Ball Fields by the Sea."
  - "Instantly Sixty-Six Pretty Women Slipped Into The City Illicitly."

The logic I found in Doctor Christian's class came from her handling of the text created by Paul Meier entitled, *Accents & Dialects for Stage & Screen*. The text breaks down in a very concise manner the different



sounds used in specific accents and dialects, and the placement of those sounds within the structure of the mouth.

❖ Movement:

I find myself resistant to movement training in theatre... too much prancing. However, I was able to establish in the last three years a wonderful way of staying fit and an extremely useful preshow physical warm-up.

Senior Lecturer Andrea Beckman introduced me to the world of Pilates, which I now believe one of the best methods an actor can use to stay in shape throughout his career. It builds strength at one's core, and allows for the actor to slowly focus on the natural way in which the body was intended to move. And, again, it provides me with the structure that my mind craves.

While a workout is helpful in maintaining long-term endurance for one's body, I learned from Lecturer Quetta Carpenter a warm-up routine that can serve for more immediate scenarios. She focused on making sure every part of the body was addressed. Beginning at the head and working down to the feet. She demonstrated an exercise for every ligament: from neck

rolls, to finger curls. Again, it is the logic of these exercises that attracts me to them.

❖ Acting for Stage and Screen:

I came to this school as a student and I leave it as an actor. What I have learned about acting technique along the way and what will stay with me as I move forward are two very separate conversations. I know that I am now fitted with the tools to handle scripts drafted for either stage or screen, to play genre's ranging from comedy to drama, and styles varying from Chekhov to Brecht.

While enrolled at this university I know that I have had several deeply inspiring acting classes, but I can only think of two moments that I am sure will remain with me for years and years to come... and both occurred outside the classroom.

The first involves Professor Franchelle Dorn. While sitting in my very first end of year evaluation, she challenged me when I suggested that I thought I knew how to act. As I mentioned earlier, I entered my graduate education with the notion that I knew how to do everything. She said to me in what I thought at the time to be a rather snide tone, "So, you think there is a *way* of doing this?"

She had caught me off guard. For the first time in a long time, I allowed myself to be open to the possibility that I was wrong. And this for me began the long process of removing the layers of false knowledge that engrossed me, so that I might find the glimmer of truth that had been buried beneath a mountain of rubbish. I doubt that she remembers that conversation, let alone the impact that it had on me. But I am sure it is a moment I will never forget.

The other moment I will never forget comes from a man I simultaneously adore and abhor. John Langs, now the artistic director of Seattle Shakespeare, had come down to Texas to direct UT's production of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Having been cast as Berowne, I spent a great deal of time with John going over text time and time again.

John had a very clear vision in his head about how Berowne was to be played. At times it felt as if he would have been much happier playing the role himself, and there were times I would have been happy to let him. I was never quite good enough for John.

Then, one day we entered into the portion of the play with Berowne's longest speech. "Have at you then, affections men at arms..." We hadn't

yet touched this piece of text together, and believe me, it was the only one. So, after I had finished with the three-page monologue I fully anticipated a plethora of notes to follow. But, what I received instead came as an enormous shock.

John said to me one word, "Excellent."

I thought he must have been joking. I didn't do anything. I didn't care anymore about impressing anybody; I had become too tired for that nonsense. I simply spoke the words. And he went on to tell me the most logical bit of advice I think I will ever hear.

He said, "Now that you have tasted excellence, just be excellent."

And for some reason, that clicked for me. Just be. Could it really be that simple? Could I have really spent the last eight years trying to find some incalculably complex answer, when all I had to do was 'Just be?'

Why not?

For eight years I have been studying acting. Five of those years I spent taking on information, because I was sure I didn't know anything. And then, when I was sure I

knew everything there was to know, I spent three years letting it all go and came to the realization that it is better to be in the unknown, then to live in the illusion of knowledge. It is a much easier world, if you can allow yourself to just be.

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